

Spirits from the Past: The Haunts of Saint George Street

BY DEBORA BABIN KATZ

Mirrors ripped from walls, tobacco smells when no one is smoking, voices and other strange happenings haunt some houses on Saint George Street. Over the years, other reporters have also recorded occurrences along this street for which there are no scientific explanations.

For Jim Pye and his wife Connie the abnormal experiences always occurred during times of heightened happiness in their family. In 1952, the couple moved into their large Victorian House on St. George Street. They were the house's



The stairwell leads to a haunted bedroom. Photo by Debora Katz

second owners. "It was built by Mr. Johnson and it took him ten years to build it; it's a very solid house," noted Jim Pye, whose wife has since passed away. Johnson ran a store in Millbrook with his wife for many years in Duxbury, and the Victorian was conveniently located nearby.

The couple did not notice any strange activity in the first years they lived in the house. This is not unusual say those who study paranormal activity. Statistically many "haunted houses" are purchased by new owners who reside there for months or years before becoming aware of spirits occupying their space.

The first real incident Jim Pye recalled was when a co-worker of his wife came for a visit with her small dog. "When the dog arrived it would not stop barking and the owner tried to quiet the dog without luck," said Pye.

When they entered the house, the dog ran straight up the stairs, continued to bark and entered a bedroom. Then the Pyes and their friend heard a very strange, loud noise. "The dog came racing down the stairs terrified and jumped into the owner's lap and tried to climb into her sweater it was so scared," described Jim Pye.

"I don't think Mrs. Johnson [the ghost] liked the barking," he said laughing. The Pyes named their ghost "Mrs. Johnson" after the woman who had died in the first floor den. "She had terrible arthritis and was unable to go upstairs later in life," noted Pye.

The dog's behavior during their friend's visit is common

with haunted houses. "Even the most independent of dogs will often become timid and nervous when brought into a haunted house and will often seem to bark at empty rooms and corridors," noted Haden Blackman, a paranormal expert and author of, *"The Field Guide to North American Hauntings."*

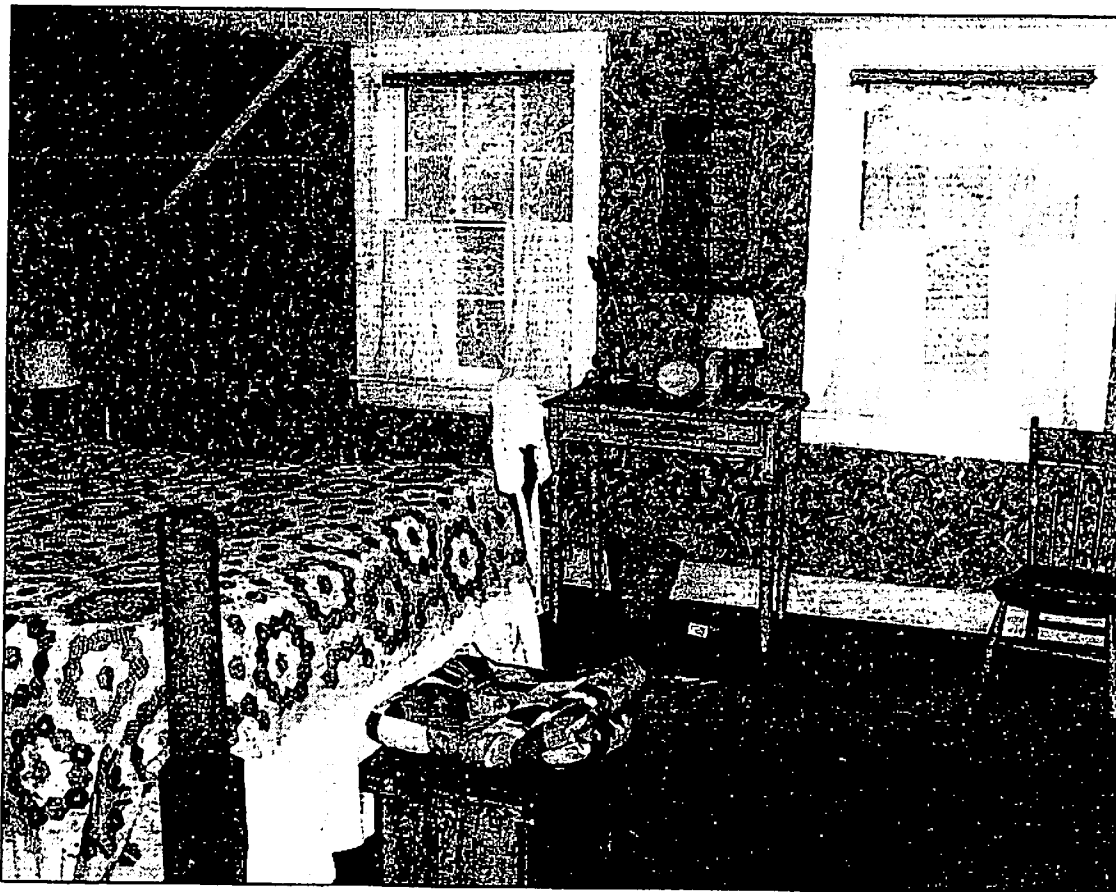
For the most part, the majority of paranormal activity occurred here when there was great happiness in the house, like during their daughters' weddings, noted Jim Pye. Around the time of one family wedding, Connie's visiting mother stayed in an upstairs bedroom. One afternoon a mirror in the room suddenly slid from the wall. It did not break, but instead leaned itself against the wall on the floor. "I thought the wire holding it up must have broken, but when I picked it up from the floor the wire was still intact and the hook on the wall was also in place," said Jim

Pye.

When a second mirror did the same thing, the Pyes were sure it was the workings of the ghost of Mrs. Johnson. "I knew she didn't like me, but I really wasn't frightened," said Connie Pye during an interview with Myna Walsh for the *Duxbury Clipper* in 1982.

Connie Pye also spoke of this mirror incident and how "the family regularly heard furniture moving on the second floor and in the peak, when no one was upstairs."

After the mirror incident, Connie decided to speak to the



The spirit of a Civil War veteran is believed to have inhabited this upstairs bedroom. Photo by Debora Katz

Cod. It was haunted.

Jane had never spoken to anyone about the encounters she herself had experienced in the house. "People would have said 'you were dreaming,' but I know the difference," she added.

At first, Jane noticed a distinct tobacco smell would occur when no one had been smoking in the house. Her granddaughter began to tell her more about her own experiences with the spirits and mentioned the tobacco smell too. Paranormal experts would refer to the tobacco smell as an aura. "Almost all haunted sites are surrounded by strong auras, invisible fields of energy that convey emotions to particularly sensitive people, such as psychics and children," noted Blackman. Such auras may also emit a strange odor, noise or array of colors, he added.

One day, the spirits appeared as a man and woman beside Jane's bed. "The man was well dressed, wore a hat and looked like someone who lived during the days of Abraham Lincoln. He was smoking a pipe," noted Jane. Paranormal experts call this type of spirit a phantom since it often appears as a human being and will seem completely real until approached by someone.

Although the ghosts seemed harmless and "didn't bother me," Jane felt she no longer wanted to share her house with them. "I told them, 'I wish you would go away and leave me alone,' and I haven't had them since," she remarked admitting that sometimes she wishes they would return.

Jane later learned more about her spirited inhabitants. On a pleasant afternoon, an older couple walked by and noticed Jane working in her garden. They stood watching and finally approached her. As it turned out, the woman had

continued on next page



The spirits of prior owners once haunted this St. George Street home.

Photo by Debora Katz

ghost. After much research, she performed an exorcism, "and let the poor haunted soul feel welcome and mean it," she said. The spirit never appeared again, and the mirrors all hang safely on the walls of this lovely Victorian house on Saint George Street.

Not far from the Pye's house, stands a lovely historical home, which was once

parts of the house. As with most early Cape Cod houses, the upstairs consists of two bedrooms, one on either side of a steep, turned stairwell.

Jane and her granddaughter felt the spirits' presence in one of the upstairs bedrooms which still boasts the original fireplace, molding and pine-planked floor. The room's only

haunted by two spirits. This center-entrance Cape Cod with its original keeping room fireplace, wide pine floors, and corner beams and wooden pegs, was probably built in the early 1800s. The current owner, who requested anonymity for the purposes of this article and who we will refer to as Jane, purchased the house in the 1950s. She, along with her granddaughter, has experienced paranormal activity in the house.

"I had ghosts, but I think I got rid of them," said Jane. The spirits haunted an upstairs bedroom, but also roamed other

windows are found at the gable end of the space, which gives it an interesting yet eerie light. "It's a peaceful feeling, though, in that room," remarked Jane who has slept in this room that was once her daughter's bedroom.

Jane's granddaughter, however, always refused to sleep in this upstairs bedroom, choosing instead a cot in the living room. "One day I asked her why she didn't want to sleep upstairs, and she replied, 'Somebody's watching me up there.'" Her granddaughter's response confirmed what Jane had known for years about her quaint Cape

Wednesday, October 17, 2001

Spirits from the Past

continued from previous page

once lived in the house as a young girl. It was her grandfather's house and she and her mother took care of him. His name was Walter Viles. He was a veteran from the Civil War where he had lost a leg.

I discovered an interesting fact about Viles at Mayflower Cemetery. He was married to Caro Weston (Caro was a nickname for Caroline). She was the daughter of Gershom Bradford Weston and Mary Moore Weston. Gershom Weston was the son of Ezra Weston II who increased the family's shipbuilding business until it was "the largest and most prosperous shipping concern on the South Shore," noted Katherine Pillsbury, the town historian and author of "*Duxbury, A Guide*." Ezra's wife was Jerusha Bradford who also came from a prosperous

maritime family. Their son Gershom succeeded his father as the second president of the Duxbury Bank. Walter Viles had married into a distinguished and prosperous family.

According to deed research Viles purchased the Cape Cod on Saint George Street in 1918 when he was 71 years old, most likely as a retirement place until his death in 1937 at the age of 90 years old (he outlived his wife Caro who died in 1926.)

Perhaps this Civil War veteran and the daughter of one of Duxbury's most affluent families are the spirits who haunted this house on Saint George Street. I was curious if Jane had asked the woman if her grandfather smoked a pipe.

"I wish they had stayed longer so I could have asked her that...there is so much now I would like to know about them," she added.

Next week we'll visit two historical sites haunted by the spirits of tragic deaths.